

March 27, 2018

Honorable Judge Nathan:

I hope that this letter finds you well. With me being listed as the #1 in my case I know that most of the things you have heard about me are negative. So I will start by introducing myself. My name is Nico Burrell. I am 25 years old. My favorite color is purple. I love reading anything that makes me think. My favorite author is Robert Greene. I play a lot of chess (I'm very good, but patience is not my strongest asset). I'm also good at basketball. I was supposed to go to a prep school but I messed that up by going to jail at 16. I'm a health nut. I work out a lot. I don't eat red meat, and I never took any drugs in my life.

At the age of 14 when my mom was deported and my stepfather was sentenced to 27 years, and my father had already been deported to Jamaica, things started to get harder for me and my family. But even at a young age, I could deal with that. But not having my mom was something I could not, and did not, want to deal with. The frustration and confusion turned to anger. I stopped playing basketball and going to school, and started hanging out on the streets.

Growing up, my brother and I were really close. There were times when I showed up late to the shelter and they wouldn't allow me back inside, and if he didn't open the door, my only other option was to sleep on the train. My pride would not allow me to ask anyone else but my brother for help. That's how close we were.

If my mom and dad had been there I never would have seen the inside of a jail. But by them not being there, I took comfort in the streets. I had so much anger inside me. They had taken my mother and I felt I had nothing to live for. At 16 years old, and traumatized, I foolishly glorified everything wrong about the streets. Having no guidance, I thought I knew it all, I foolishly thought I was a grown man. I was on the streets sun up and sun down, and thought that qualified me to wear the title.

C74 on Rikers Island was one of the worst places I have ever been in my life. It was a living hell. My first 3 weeks I was jumped and beat up by a group of 3 guys because I did not want to give up my commissary goods. Being in Rikers after several months I was in trouble a lot. I was getting into constant fights and getting sent to the box. At the time, young, terrified and ignorant, I felt I had to protect myself and to prove myself. I believed my reputation for getting into fights meant something.

My next stop was Clinton Correctional Facility. I was scared but tried not to show it. I was 18 and around guys that had gotten life sentences. People got cut and stabbed every day. I was two cells away when I heard a boy getting raped. But the horrors at Clinton were a blessing in disguise. I changed my mental attitude talking to older guys. My sister getting shot and my first nephew coming to see me and not recognizing me was what really changed me. My sister getting shot made me question myself as a man. Wasn't I supposed to guide and protect her? Yes, but I was in jail.

That year something really changed inside me. I got my GED, and completed a building maintenance trade course. My 2 years in Clinton I spent learning new skills, improving my mind, these years matured me, readied me for society. My classification was reduced from max to medium for my good behavior. There I also developed a passion for music. I began putting all my thoughts on paper. I wrote and wrote songs and lyrics. I also kept doing well. I was released early, on August 28, 2014.

Coming home, doing music, was hard. No one knew who I was. No one took me seriously and people thought I was coming home to do no good. I was lost as to what kind of music I should make. So I Googled and learned about artists like Meek Mill, Rich Ross, Drake and Future and made songs on the same topics, street life. Though I know what I was rapping about wasn't positive, I wanted the same exposure these big time rappers had.

Feeling like a failure most of my life, music was something I took seriously, not to only change my family's circumstances, but I also wanted to make them proud. My 12th month home, my music wasn't moving as fast as I wanted. I finished a program called CEO which helped me find jobs. I worked with them for 2 months until I got laid off from BMCC raking leaves. I was stressed out and almost quit doing music. I was tired of asking my stepmom and sisters for money for studio time and to shoot videos. I hit rock bottom again when my cousin's grandmother kicked me out. She didn't believe I would make it as a rapper and told me I'm wasting my life on something that's not going to happen. I had nowhere to go. My parole officer sent me to a men's shelter. Michelle Jemison, my sister took me in. When I told her I felt like quitting she surprised me and said that she didn't know me for giving up. After that conversation I knew I had to do it, I had to make it, not only for me, but for my family. I took the same anger and pain I had felt when I lost my parents and put it into something positive. I took every dollar I had and spent every moment working on my music, at home, in the studio, anywhere and everywhere.

I made bad decisions when I was 16. Now I see how toxic my reputation was to my life because I feel like it is still coming back to haunt me in this present situation I am in now. My family's waiting on me to get home so we can move away from New York and start over. I plan on continuing my music career. There are two major labels that want to meet with me and my manager. There are also people interested in me performing at parties, baby showers and Sweet Sixteens. Some people are even offering me lots of money to perform.

Even though I hate giving up and I hate being negative, if music does not work out for me, I have a Plan B. I have my OSHA certificate, and I'm also good with my hands, so I will work doing construction while continuing my education. There are two things that will motivate me to never return to jail and that will push me to bettering myself more, and that is the determination in proving everybody wrong about me and the fear of feeling I am a let-down and a disappointment to my family.

Judge Nathan I don't know if you have ever felt that feeling before, but it is the worst feeling I have ever felt in my life AND I never want to feel it again.

I pray to God every night for a chance. A chance to see my grandmother again, to hug her and kiss her, to rub her feet when they get swollen, to scratch her back for her, to change the channel for her when she can't find the remote (even though it would be right there on her pillow). My grandmother is my life, the one person that never abandoned me, that never gave up on me even when I gave up on myself. Maybe she wouldn't be this sick if I was there for her the 66 months I was locked up. Maybe she wouldn't be this sick if I didn't stress her out with these situations I have gotten myself into. But for these last years she has left I want to be there for her.

Judge Nathan I know what the news says about me and I know what the AUSA says about me. But that's not me. Give me a chance to prove these people wrong, give me a chance to go home and be the best Nico Burrell I could be. Give me a chance to help my family, and regardless of what the end result is within this case, I know one thing. I won't let my mistakes or my past define me anymore!

Thank you for your time Judge Nathan.

Sincerely,

Nico Burrell

(Typed by my Attorney Judith Vargas at my request).